

## Health and Human Services Committee Testimony

### SB 1044

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOUPMENT OF STATE COSTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO LOW WAGE EMPLOYERS.

12 March 2015

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My Name is Kathy Queen, retiring director of Wallingford Community Day Care Center, Inc. and Co-Chair of the State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum. I am here today to ask your support of SB 1044, An Act Concerning the Recoupment of State Costs Attributable to Low Wage Employers.

Since 1968, Connecticut has provided high quality affordable early childhood care and education to 4000 children in 102 centers statewide thereby allowing low and moderate income working parent families to attain and sustain self-sufficiency while ensuring that children have the best education possible. We serve infants, toddlers, and preschoolers and assist families to access needed services. Over the years, funding has been limited and in recent years stagnant, while requirements for our programs and staff have risen exponentially. We have embraced mandates to become NAEYC accredited, many of our centers have school readiness classrooms, and we all agree that higher standards result in higher quality. Unfortunately, the funding has not kept pace. Our teachers are paid about half the wages that similarly educated teachers are paid in our public schools. In 1976, we fought for and gained a minimum wage requirement for our teachers that was equal to the wage for a first year teacher in a public school. That minimum has never been raised. According to the State Department of Labor, our teachers now earn on average \$11.00 per hour (\$22,880.00) LESS than their public school colleagues.

Our teachers qualify for the low income programs they also serve. They cannot afford our co-pays for health insurance and most qualify for Husky. If they have families, they frequently qualify for food stamps, low income housing, and other state funded benefits. We cannot continue to let this happen to these professionals. We have asked that the requirements for an Early Childhood Teacher Credential be at least delayed until there is compensation, but are told there will not be quality until teachers jump through more hoops to "prove" their worth; even though we won't pay them if they do. OEC has "grandfathered" teachers employed as on June 30, 2015, but will not consider efforts to expand that group of employees to include all staff. On July 1, 2015, we will not have a sufficient pool of applicants should we need to replace our staff who can no longer afford to work for us.

This bill, SB 1044, at least makes an effort to find a means to support the system we demand. We would suggest that the bill be amended to explicitly state that the fees collected should be used to increase wages for child care workers according to a fee schedule commensurate with education and experience. We would also encourage that the "advisory" group noted in the bill be given the authority to ensure that the funds collected be used to compensate the front line employees in early childhood, home care, and other grossly underpaid dedicated workers in funded programs.

We understand the dire budget facing our state this year. We've heard all the gloom and doom forecasts, but assure you our dedicated well educated teachers live with that gloom and doom every day. SB 1044 offers hope that other means can be found to compensate our dedicated teachers. We encourage you to "think outside the box" and pass this bill to allow that conversation to move forward. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully Submitted:

Kathleen M. Queen,

Director Emeritus, Wallingford Community Day Care Center, Inc.

Co-Chair, State Funded Child Development Centers Directors Forum